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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 007794

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: PDAS CHENEY DISCUSSES ELECTIONS WITH EGYPTIAN  
INTERIOR MINISTER

REF: CAIRO 7155

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) During a September 29 meeting, NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney and DAS Scott Carpenter discussed with Interior Minister General Habib El-Adly preparations for Egypt's parliamentary elections. Adly insisted that police and other security personnel would adhere to strict neutrality through the electoral process, and attributed most past charges of interference to sour grapes from losing candidates. Adly acknowledged that there were problems with the voters lists, but asserted that MOI strictly applied the law with regard to maintaining and controlling them. Adly claimed MOI would step up voter information campaigns and would try to avoid even the appearance of intimidation. In this regard, Adly announced that he had decided "to act on the U.S. Ambassador's advice" and move those polling places currently in police stations to neutral venues. Adly said he had no objection to the introduction of transparent ballot boxes, but predicted Egyptian judges would perceive such an initiative as a slight. We have since learned that the MOI may be moving ahead on its own with transparent boxes. End summary.

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Watchword Neutrality  
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2. (C) Adly affirmed that Egyptian security forces would be strictly neutral during the process. Adly dismissed complaints that Egyptian police had intervened on behalf of ruling party candidates during the 2000 parliamentary elections, characterizing the charges as sour grapes from candidates who failed to compete effectively. Adly noted that 17 members associated with the Muslim Brotherhood had won seats in the 2000 elections, citing this fact as evidence of the Ministry of Interior's neutrality: "they never would have won if I had been dictating the results" he stated. At the same time, Adly continued, police have a duty to maintain public order and sometimes have to intervene when violence between supporters of rival candidates erupts. A number of such incidents occurred in 2000, he stated, particularly in the Nile Delta.

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Voter List Woes  
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3. (C) PDAS Cheney asked Adly about problems with the voter lists, maintained by the Ministry of Interior. Flaws in the voter list were the single biggest problem in the September 7 presidential election, according to both domestic election monitors and assessments by NDI and IRI. Adly acknowledged that the lists were riddled with imperfections, but insisted that the MOI adhered rigorously to the law in maintaining the lists. According to the law, the Minister stated, citizens have an annual three month window, between December and March, to add or correct entries in the voter lists. Citizens born after 1981 are automatically entered onto the voter list, he added.

4. (C) PDAS Cheney also asked the Minister about reports that many deceased citizens continue to haunt the voter lists (observers contend these dead voters are often put to work by persons tampering with elections). Adly acknowledged that the GOE encountered difficulties in purging the lists of the deceased. Many old civil records are handwritten the Minister explained, and names get garbled at the data entry process. Citizens have a responsibility to ensure their names are correctly registered, but too few actually exercise this responsibility, he added, because Egypt has not had, "for certain historical reasons," a strong "culture of political participation."

5. (C) On complaints that opposition parties had not had the opportunity to review voter lists in advance of the September 7 elections, Adly insisted that these had been the instructions of the Presidential Elections Commission -- the

lists were not to be distributed in advance to any party. He was surprised by claims that the ruling NDP had received advance copies of the lists. "Some of the opposition claims distort reality," he stated.

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More Information, Less Intimidation  
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16. (C) The MOI was stepping up its public information campaign, Adly stated, in newspapers, radio, and television, in order to be sure citizens had adequate information about where, when, and how to vote. Adly lamented that sometimes MOI initiatives to encourage participation were misinterpreted as intimidation. He recounted that the MOI had called off past efforts to deliver voter cards to voters' residences, after the ministry had been accused of attempting to frighten citizens into voting for Mubarak. In the same vein, Adly added "I have decided to act on the advice of your new Ambassador (reftel), and I have ordered that all polling places located in police stations be moved to alternate sites." (Comment: The decision to move voting out of police stations, based on a recommendation by U.S.-led assessment teams that watched the Sept. 7 presidential election, is a positive development. End comment.)

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Party Penetration  
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17. (C) PDAS Cheney asked the Minister about reports that State Security elements penetrate opposition parties in order to monitor them. Adly at first seemed taken aback but quickly found his stride, stating that he was aware of such charges, and reprised the theme that the MOI is often scapegoated by uncompetitive candidates and parties. When PDAS Cheney pressed on whether there would be a change in policy on the issue of infiltration of opposition parties, Adly replied, &I must have my people there because I need to know what is going on on the ground.8 (Comment: We noted that Adly did not explicitly deny the charge. We judge claims that State Security closely monitors party activity, to include paying or implanting informers, as generally credible. In Ayman Nour's criminal forgery trial, his entire defense rests upon claims that he was framed by State Security elements which penetrated the Ghad Party. End comment.)

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Transparent Boxes  
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18. (C) Finally, PDAS Cheney asked the Minister about the possibility of using transparent ballot boxes in the coming elections. Such boxes have become standard in many parts of the world, she noted, and were an important symbol of a transparent electoral process. Adly was non-committal in his response, predicting that judges charged with overseeing the elections would perceive the move as a slight to their integrity. "The judges have been stubborn on so many issues," he stated. "Personally, I have no objection to the idea," Adly added. (Comment: We have since heard that MOI may be moving forward with its own procurement of transparent ballot boxes for the parliamentary elections. According to the prominent lawyer Mona Zulficar, who met the PDAS and DAS on September 29, and who has been undertaking a private initiative to urge the GOE to adopt the boxes, the MOI is seeking to procure transparent boxes on its own. An MOI source told us that the transparent box issue was "under active consideration" but would not confirm whether a decision has been made. End comment.)

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